



THE IMPACT OF EXPLORATION ON RESOURCE UTILIZATION AND GOAL FOCUS IN TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This research investigated the relationship between Organizational exploration, resource utilization and goal focus in Nigerian Telecommunication firms. The sample for this study consisted of 84 management staff from the four leading Telecommunication giants (MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9 Mobile). The data for this research was collected using the questionnaire method. The Kendall Tau statistical tool was used to test the relationships between the variables under review. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between Exploration and both of Resource utilization and Goal focus. It was concluded based on our statistical analysis that organizational exploration enhances corporate health. More specifically, it was concluded that exploration enhances resource utilization and goal focus. In view of these results and conclusions above, this study recommends that; Managers should acknowledge the importance of exploration in fostering a better resource utilization which will bring about a healthy organization. Employee involvement, especially employees that are opened to change should be encouraged at all organization level.

Keywords: *Exploration, Resource utilization, goal focus, health, organization*

Introduction

The health status of an organization especially in a challenging environment is characterized by high levels of uncertainty and intense competition occasioned by globalization and rapid technological advancement will be a long way in predicting the future of such organization. In order to survive and excel in the middle of a retinue of complexities especially from the external environment with dire consequences and characteristics beyond direct influence of management there is therefore the need to imbibe and sustain capacity to innovate so also the ability to incrementally and successfully shift to fresh opportunities (Heifetz and Linsky 2002). A healthy organization is a wealthy organization, and if the goal of organizations among other goals is to maximize the wealth of its stock holders, then it becomes imperative that the organization strive towards good health, this is so because if an organization is unhealthy (ill) the realization of its strategic objectives becomes a mirage.

Initiating an ambidextrous strategy in an organization could immunize the organization against imminent and possible illness; as such initiatives could give room for cost effectiveness as well as making firms to sustain different customers' needs which is most desirable. Moreover, ambidexterity is vital for organizational health and survival as well as its success.

Previous studies points to the fact that many firms that exhibits healthy traits by way of being very successful are known to be ambidextrous. According to Benner and Tushman, (2003), many ambidextrous organizations possess the ability and the capacity to create a competitive advantage via the advancement of exploitative and exploratory innovation simultaneously. Ambidextrous organizations achieve the coordination of their current operations while simultaneously effectively adapting to changing environmental demands (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Jansen, 2005; Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008).

Broadly speaking ambidexterity connotes organization's ability to pursue two different things at one go. Ambidextrous firms have the capacity to exploit prevailing competencies together with exploring new opportunities with same dexterity.

Ability to pursue at the same time explorative (radical) as well as exploitative (incremental) innovation simultaneously so as to remain competitive in the long-run is a major challenge for organizations (March, 1991). Scholars have come to the general agreement that ambidextrous firms are those who possess the capacity to exploit prevailing competencies and explore new opportunities. Irrespective of these general consensus, there is considerable ambiguity and some vagueness regarding the nature of exploitation and exploration and vice versa ambidexterity construct (Cao, Gedajlovic and Zhang, 2009; Junni, Sarala, Taras and Tarba, 2013; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013). A major argument in respect of organizational ambidexterity research points to the fact that firms either connected or balanced ambidexterity are more likely to achieve better performance effects when compared to those who lay much emphases on one activity over the other (Junni et al., 2013; Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008).

Ambidextrous organizations can easily achieve success in an atmosphere characterized by high degree of turbulence (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004).

The idea that heralds the value of Organizational' Ambidexterity is that in an organization there are always tensions to be faced (e.g., investment in current and future projects,

differentiation vs. low-cost production). Ambidextrous companies coordinate them and in so doing they become successful companies (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). Ambidexterity compels managers to reason paradoxically. In real sense, ambidexterity concept goes far beyond the mere reconciliation between two tensions. Usually paradoxically ambidextrous approaches manage to get both poles at a high level.

However, several empirical studies have in the past established a connection between other organizational results and organizational ambidexterity, but no empirical evidence has been created on corporate ambidexterity and corporate health, especially in the Nigerian work environment in general and in the work environment telecommunications sector. For example, Hernández, Sánchez-Pérez and Segovia-López (2011), concludes that both exploitation and exploration proved to positively affect organizational performance. Thus, a firm that engages in both exploitation and exploration activities enjoys a great level of organizational performance. Some researchers have argued that exploration and exploitation are mutually exclusive; an indication that the connection between exploitation and exploration is negative, conversely, Gupta, Smith, and Shalley (2006) opined that this is not necessarily true and that the link between exploration and exploitation may be positive. Given the fact that past studies on the organizational ambidexterity concept are yet to establish any relationship with corporate health irrespective of empirical evidence of positive and significant link between ambidexterity and other organizational results makes this study imperative.

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between exploration and resource utilization in the Nigerian telecommunication sector

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between exploration and goal focus in the Nigerian telecommunication sector

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Learning Theory (OL)

Though there is no universal theory of OL (Easterby Smith, 1997), the general OL schema includes a learner, a learning process, and a learning product (Argyris & Shon, 1996). But March (1991) propounded a model of organizational learning where he discussed the complementary nature of learning.

The Learner

Researchers have discussed this schema by focusing on one or all of the three elements. Some scholars believe the individual is the learner (Holmqvist, 2009). Others believe the organization is the learner (Dixon, 1992). Researchers believe it is not easy to discern whether it is the individual learner who learns in an organization or whether it is the organization itself (Gioia & Sims, 1986).

Many believe OL is likely to remain an umbrella 'concept for many related concepts (Argote, 1999). Concepts relevant to the individual as learner include cognition (processes of knowing), and the information processing model, where individuals acquire, form, store, manipulate, and discard information (Akgun et al., 2003). Other concepts point to the organization as learner. One is the concept of absorption capacity, 'which refers to the

organization's learning ability. Organizations with high absorptive capacity are able imitate or adapt the innovations of others to their own needs, and are also able to create and exploit new knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1989).

The immensity of absorptive capacity translates to high levels of Exploitation and Exploration and subsequent Organizational Ambidexterity. But organizations vary in the levels of absorptive capacities and/or learning abilities they possess (Argote, 1999; Katila & Ahuja, 2002). This variation is the disparity between discovering 'organizations and enacting 'organizations (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Discovering organizations possess a reactive stance and adapt efficiently and logically to environmental changes. Conversely, enacting organizations proactively create the transformation in the environment they would be interested in seeing, and then respond to them.

In this conceptual framework, discovering organizations possess high exploitative competence whereas enacting organizations are highly explorative.

Marquardt (1999) describes the difference between organizational learning and individual as follows:

Organizational Learning occurs through the shared insights, knowledge, and mental models of members of the organization. Second, it relies on past experience and knowledge that is, on organizational memory, which based on institutional mechanisms (e.g. strategies, policies and explicit models) employed in retaining knowledge. Third, Organizational Learning represents the enhanced intellectual and productive capability gained through corporate-wide commitment to continuous improvement.

The Learning Process

Some researchers choose the learning process itself as a central point of Organizational Learning. Organizational Learning is defined by Pisano (1994) as a problem solving process triggered by gaps between actual and potential performance. Organizational Learning is a process that enhances the strategic renewal of an organization (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999).

Additionally, Organizational Learning is a process occurring when knowledge about action outcome relationships and the effect of the environment on these relationships is developed. The link between organizations and their environments may be achieved through Organizational Learning, a process of identifying environmental changes and contexts, and successfully coping with them.

The Learning Product

The learning product of OL is change; the creation of something new. The something new 'need not be tangible or observable; it may be related to insights or new understandings (Huber, 1991).

Definition of Organizational Learning is relevant here. He claims that the entity will know if the range of its potential behavior has changed through information processing. The learning product of change implies learning does not only involve learning something new, but unlearning something old that is blocking the way for the new to emerge (Szulanski, 2003). For Weick (1991), the outstanding characteristic of learning is combination of same stimulus

and different response. Weick (1991) contends individual learning happens when same stimulus and different response is accomplished at the individual level and organizational learning happens when same stimulus and different response is accomplished by groups of persons in the organization. Others believe learning and change occur throughout the firm, at individual, team, and organization levels (Akgun, Lynn, & Byrne, 2003).

Methodology

The population of this study consists of all Telecommunication firms registered with the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC). However, this study only focused on the four major and visible firms that have national coverage namely MTN, Airtel, Globacom and 9mobile with a population of 190. A sample size of 129 was gotten using Taro Yamene formula. To empirically evaluate the relationships between organizational ambidexterity and corporate health in Nigerian telecommunication firms, data obtained with the aid of questionnaire was analyzed using the Kendall's Tau correlation Coefficient statistical technique. The test requires that the responses be at least ordinal level. That is, the response can be ranked from high to low. This statistical tool is considered appropriate as the variables in this study were measured in ordinal scales.

Data Analyses

Table 1. Correlations between exploration, resource utilization and goal focus

			Exploration	Resource Utilisation	Goal Focus
Kendall's tau_b	Exploration	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.305**	.385
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	84	84	84
	Resource Utilisation	Correlation Coefficient	.305**	1.000	.491**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	84	84	84
	Goal Focus	Correlation Coefficient	.385	.491**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	84	84	84

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 revealed the correlations between exploration and resource utilization, and exploration and goal focus. The output showed moderate positive relationships between the variables. Specifically, there was a moderate positive relationship between exploration and resource utilisation ($\tau_b = .305$, $n = 84$, $P < .01$), while the relationship between exploration and goal focus was also moderately positive ($\tau_b = .385$, $n = 84$, $P < .01$). These results imply that, the higher the exploration among the firms, the higher the achieve resource utilization and goal focus. Based on these results, the null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative hypotheses accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The first cluster comprises hypotheses one and two. The results in table 1 above indicate moderate correlations between exploration and both proxies of corporate health (resource

utilization and goal focus). The relationships were positive and significant enough to reject the null hypotheses (1 and 2).

This result signifies that exploration efforts by the telecommunication firms have a moderate influence on corporate health. More so, higher level of exploration leads to higher level of resource utilization and goal focus since the correlation values were positive. Therefore, the null hypotheses (1 and 2) were rejected and their alternative accepted.

Thus, it is concluded that:

- i. Exploration leads to higher level of resource utilization among the telecommunication firms in the South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria.
- ii. Increase in exploration activities results to increase in goal focus among the telecommunication firms.

Conclusion

The result shows that exploration has a positive and significant relationship with resource utilization. Although no study in time past have linked ambidexterity with corporate health but this finding can be juxtapose with the findings of Auh and Mengue (2005) who reported a significant relationship between organizational Ambidexterity and firms Growth, we argue here that firm's growth is synonymous to corporate health given the fact that for a firm to grow, her health status must be perfect, an organization can be tagged artificial human. The biological being must be in good health in other to grow, otherwise the growth will be distorted, this can also be liken to organizations, it is on this premise we hinged our argument that this finding is similar to the findings of Auh and Mengue (2005). This means that exploration positively influence resource utilization. That is when an organization has the capacity to explore existing competencies such organization will achieve a perfect health status. Most organizations lack the ability to effectively and efficiently coordinate and maintain inputs; particularly personnel with a minimal sense of strain. It is important that firms offers insights for practitioners on how they can build up their internal resources as organizational capital, over which they have relatively greater control than external factors, to enhance the corporate health.

Ambidexterity propels organizations and their employees to go beyond boundaries in their task description, fostering inter-employee support and trust. Furthermore, these employees are stated to be more looking for internal and external linkages and social relationship to benefit the organization. Therefore, ambidextrous employees could be more likely to think in the best interest of the organization they work for, instead of mainly pursuing their own interest (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004).

Result shows that exploration and goal focus are positively related. As mentioned earlier, there exist no empirical evidence on the relationship between exploration and goal focus. Notwithstanding, this result is similar to the study by Auh and Mengue (2005) who reported a significant relationship between organizational Ambidexterity and firms Growth. Drawing from our earlier argument that organizations cannot grow if they are not healthy, we therefore insist that firm's growth is synonymous to firm's health status. The significance of this result lies in the fact that organizations that want to maintain a healthy status must be goal focused, that is they must possess the ability to have clarity, acceptance, support, and advocacy of school wide goals as well as objectives. An organization that wants to achieve a sound health

status through ambidexterity should attain high levels of cooperation internally and externally, for cooperation will create new and shared knowledge which will enhance the exploration and exploitation activities of the organization which in turn predicts corporate health. This is in line with earlier research, showing that knowledge transfer is important for innovative activities which will cause organizations to be healthy (Carlile, 2004; Jansen, Tempelaar, Bosch, & Volberda, 2009; Kauppila, 2010).

Recommendations

In view of the conclusion drawn above, this study therefore presents the following recommendations:

- (i) Since exploratory activities enhance resource utilization, managers should acknowledge the importance of exploration in fostering a better resource utilization which will bring about a healthy organization. Employee involvement, especially employees that are opened to change should be encouraged at all level of the organization.
- (ii) Conscious effort should be made to sensitize employees at all levels to embrace exploratory activities as it is initiated by top management. Exploring existing competencies demands among others full cooperation of employees, their effort in pursuing exploration is needed from time to time as the organization moves towards achieving its strategic objectives.
- (iii) Management should give full support to exploitative activities within the organization since exploitation enhances resource utilization. Partnering up with competitors, customers, as well as suppliers is very important. There should be sound and robust communication channels as these will foster healthy relationship among organizational members as well as accentuate the importance of cooperation across organizational boundaries as a way of hastening the process of a healthy organization.

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